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AUTHOR Locke, Don C.
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ABSTRACT

The role of schools in the development of good citizenship has been well established. This role has expanded to include the incorporation of the cultural differences of students. In order to meet this requirement there must be a strong commitment from the leadership of an educational system to the education of all students. Particular attention should be paid to culturally non-dominant students. Educators must also understand that they are responsible for teaching the values of the culture. The system must ensure those individuals willing to implement change are supported in their efforts. Recommendations are presented for what individual schools can do to meet these multicultural objectives. Eleven guiding principles are reviewed that serve as a philosophy for increasing multicultural understanding. (JDM)

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Applying Multiculturalism: The Resolution of a Problem(atic) Situation

by

Don C. Locke

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Chapter Nineteen

Applying Multiculturalism
The Resolution of a Problem(atic) Situation

Don C. Locke
Asheville Graduate Center,
North Carolina State University, Asheville, North Carolina

We live in an age of diversity and multiculturalism. This means that we live among people of many cultures, which necessitates that we respond differently to the many different cultural groups. New projections are that the U.S. population will continue to change such that ethnic diversity will be the norm. By the year 2030, projections are that 14.4% of the population will be African American, 18.9% Hispanic, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996) and that 45% of students in public schools will be from non–Anglo-European backgrounds (Sue, Parham, & Bonilla-Santiago, 1998). These projections challenge schools to include in their mission the preparation of all students for significant changes in the schools and in society. The role of educators has been expanded to include the consideration of the cultural identity of students. In this expanded role, educators have a responsibility to increase their awareness, knowledge, and skills so that all students are taught to recognize the influences of culture on their lives, the influences of cultural group membership on their present and future behaviors, and the effect of diversity on life in general. In doing so, educators must recognize the role of culture in their interactions with each other and with their students.

Addressing Needs

The role of the school in the development of good citizenship has been firmly established. Damon (1988) argued that society (i.e., schools) should focus on the moral virtues of honesty, kindness, and concern for others; a sense of responsibility; and a sense of fairness. These moral

issues are essential to the full education of all students if they are to be prepared for their place in a diverse world. Consider the implications of the following facts. In one hour, about 500 new U.S. Americans will join us. Nearly 440 will be born here; 60 will immigrate. The names will be rich and strange, echoes from the far corners of the globe. The color of their skin will vary. Some will be wealthy, some comfortable, too many will be poor. All of them will be, or will aspire to be, U.S. Americans.

In the same one-hour period, more than 320 young people in the United States will make personal decisions that will affect them for the rest of their lives. Their families, their communities, and the entire nation will also live with the consequences. Nearly 100 will drop out of school; 170 will commit a violent crime against another human being; and 54 teenage girls will give birth, 32 of them out of wedlock.

And each succeeding hour, another 320 young people will repeat the same mistakes. By the end of the year, one million students will have dropped out of school, 1.3 million young people will have committed a violent crime, and 478,000 teenagers will have given birth. Each of these young people is also a U.S. American, and a disproportionate number of them are members of culturally diverse, non–Anglo-European ethnic groups. Most of them are *not* immigrants.

Multiculturalism Defined

Multiculturalism is an interdisciplinary process rather than a single program or a series of activities. Included in this process are the concepts embraced by cultural pluralism, ethnic and intercultural studies, and intergroup and human relations. The basic aim of multiculturalism is to help individuals to accept themselves and others as having dignity and worth. To achieve this aim, multiculturalism emphasizes similarities and differences among individuals and groups. Similarities are viewed as those characteristics that make people human, and differences are viewed as those characteristics that make each person or group unique and special. In this context, differences are viewed as positive. Thus, individuals are helped to respect and accept a wide range of diversity, including physical differences, emotional differences, cultural differences, and differences in lifestyles among individuals and groups. Educational systems must engage in a careful and systematic examination of the values being taught and how these values affect both those who are culturally different and members of the dominant culture.

What Educational Systems Must Do

First, there must be a strong commitment from the leadership of an educational system to the education of *all* students, with particular attention given to the needs of culturally non-dominant students. The school board and the superintendent set the tone and establish the agenda for what goes on in the system. They must see themselves as initiators of change and become more directly involved in the process through such efforts as increased on-site visitation or participation in classroom activities.

Second, educators must understand that they are responsible for teaching the values of the culture. Staff at all levels of the educational system must be willing to openly investigate their practices in terms of which values are being promoted by which practices. Evaluation should include input from all cultural groups. For example, Brookover (1985) characterized the value issue thusly:

> Under the guise of individual differences, meeting individual needs, continuous progress, humanistic education, and now kindergarten redshirting, we have sought to justify shortchanging the children of poor and minorities in American schools. The belief in vast differences in "intelligence" or ability to learn, which are highly associated with race and socioeconomic status of the family, provide the pervasive "justification" for discriminatory educational programs within our schools (p. 261).

Third, the system must ensure that those individuals willing to implement changes are supported in their efforts. No individual should feel reluctant to make changes because he or she is unsure of what the administration thinks or feels about implementing multicultural strategies. For example, school personnel must be able to advocate for children without feeling threatened for doing so.

Fourth, all members of the institution must communicate that they value diversity. They must first decide what diversity means in the context of their community and then evaluate practices and procedures in terms of their relationship to diversity. All school administrators must communicate that they believe that there is more than one right way to think, feel, believe, and act. They must communicate in open forums that differences in these areas do not mean second-class status, a decrease in excellence, or a threat to the dominant culture.

Finally, educators need to engage in a systemwide strategic planning and evaluation process related to the education of children from non-dominant

cultures. Issues to consider as part of this planning process are the numbers of school personnel who are culturally different, plans for improving the multicultural competence of all staff, goals for educational achievement for culturally non-dominant students, and how policies will be implemented relative to these students. Such a planning process would include an ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness in meeting the goals established in the planning process.

What Individual Schools Must Do

How is this accomplished at the school level? The staffing composition and patterns throughout the school should reflect the pluralistic nature of the U.S. American society. Once the staff is in place, efforts must be made to ensure that they are culturally sensitive. This culturally sensitive staff must adopt and use appropriate, flexible, and unbiased curricula that incorporate the contributions of all groups. Instructional materials must be free of bias, omissions, and stereotypes. Instructional materials must be inclusive rather than supplementary. Finally, educational evaluation procedures must be sensitive to different learning styles. Lee (2001) stated that cultural diversity must be addressed in the provision of comprehensive school guidance and counseling programs. In the role of consultant, school counselors must be prepared to address a variety of issues, concerns, or problems that might arise in their school.

An Example

In spite of the best efforts and intentions, problems will arise that will challenge the best school, with the best staff, implementing the best possible multicultural objectives. When problems arise, individuals tend to resort to the thoughts and ideas that reflect their pasts and that shelter them from revealing thoughts or behaviors that might be challenged in the multicultural arena. One example illustrates this process.

The Situation

The elementary school in question was located in a medium-sized city in the southeastern United States, and more than half the students came from culturally non-dominant backgrounds. The school found itself challenged by an incident that seemed to stall the movement toward increased emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism. The incident began when a White teacher described an African American student using a term that some White and African American staff considered racist. Identification of the epithet used by the White teacher is not important

because the purpose of this example is to illustrate a process, rather than to decide whether a particular term is racist. That many considered the term racist and that the event precipitated an atmosphere in the school which stalled its multicultural efforts are the important factors.

By the time I was invited to the school as a multicultural consultant, relationships had deteriorated and had become polarized. Two rather extreme positions existed: (a) that the event was typical of the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of many others in the school who covertly engaged in other racist behaviors, and (b) that the teacher's statement was an individual behavior, occurring accidentally and probably not even reflecting her true beliefs. Interestingly, the teacher had resigned her position as a result of the tension in the school.

Successes

I scheduled small-group meetings with all school personnel to discuss the situation around topics of communication, respect, and conflict resolution. The small groups consisted of 8 to 12 participants who were randomly assigned to each group. The following questions were used to stimulate the conversation:

- What is your general communication style?
- How do you express emotions?
- What is the role of body language in communication?
- How do you use personal space?
- How do you gain someone's respect?
- How can you show someone respect?
- How do you determine when you are in conflict?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- How does "saving face" affect your dealing with conflict?
- How does culture affect your communication style, your view of respect, and your attitudes about conflict?

In each group the participants expressed satisfaction with their experience and an appreciation that the time devoted to discussion of the issues around conflict resolution was well spent.

The small-group sessions were a prelude to a two-hour schoolwide meeting on multicultural team building. Several central office personnel also joined the faculty for this meeting. It was clear at the beginning of this meeting that the atmosphere was informal and relaxed, and a general spirit of collegiality existed. Some general rules were established for the meeting, and I briefly discussed the elements necessary for our meeting and for building trust: honesty (truth

with integrity and without exaggerations or lies), openness (willingness to listen fully and share all ideas and feelings), consistency (predictable responses and stable principles), and respect (treating all people with dignity, equality, and fairness). I observed the following: participants listening to each other, most individuals participating, a comfort with disagreement, a willingness to confront others' ideas, and a commitment to leave some things in the past and move toward different relationships in the future. There was a commitment to deal with race and race issues forthrightly without personal attacks.

What I Learned

This experience confirmed my belief that race remains a source of potential conflict in multicultural environments. Even so, participants demonstrated a willingness to work through issues in an environment of trust and respect. Even when issues are allowed to smolder, there is a possibility for resolution leading to a refocusing on students and education as the purpose of the institution. Participants can come to appreciate and value cultural differences, attitudes, and behaviors.

Principles of Multicultural Practice for Addressing Similar Situations

A number of principles serve as a guiding philosophy for increasing multicultural understanding (Locke, 1998). They are:

1. The golden rule, "Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you," is the core of good human relations.
2. Learn as much as possible about your own culture. People can appreciate another culture much more if they first appreciate their own culture.
3. Work at being open and honest in your relationships with members of various cultures. Be open to different attitudes and values, and encourage those different from you to be open and honest with you about issues related to their culture. Attend to the verbal and nonverbal communication patterns between yourself and your culturally different students or clients.
4. Seek genuine respect and appreciation for culturally different attitudes and behaviors. Demonstrate that you both recognize and value the cultures of those different from yourself. One way to demonstrate respect is to start from the student's or client's life experiences, not from your own.
5. Seek to gain insight into key cultural similarities and differences between your individual style and those of colleagues in your school.

Learn to accurately "read" your colleagues' behavior and understand the "why" behind their actions.

6. Keep in mind that individuals are both members of their cultural group and unique individuals as well. Strive to keep a healthy balance between your view of students as cultural beings and as unique beings.
7. Learn to examine your cultural biases, prejudices, and stereotypes. Eliminate any behaviors that suggest prejudice or racism and do not tolerate such behaviors from your colleagues or from other members of your own cultural group. Teach your students how to recognize bias and how to challenge stereotypes.
8. Encourage administrators and supervisors in your school or agency to institutionalize practices that acknowledge the diversity among your students.
9. Hold high expectations of your culturally non-dominant students or clients and encourage others who work with diverse populations to do likewise.
10. Ask questions about the culture of ethnically different groups. Learn as much as possible about different cultures and share what you learn with others. Be honest in your interactions. Recognize that you will make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.
11. Develop culturally specific strategies, techniques, and programs to foster the psychological development of culturally non-dominant individuals and groups.

Cultural competence begins with core fundamental beliefs of warmth, empathy, and genuineness, and continues with appreciation and respect for cultural differences, both of which result in culturally congruent behaviors. Cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable the system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Educators who practice culturally competent behaviors have gone beyond just learning behaviors; they demonstrate inherent caring, appreciation, affirmation, and respect for others in their environment. Culturally competent behaviors lead to more effective teaching and learning.

Developing culturally appropriate programs is an evolving process. In schools, as in all other institutions, this process requires commitment, time, interest in changing the organization, and a willingness to evaluate one's personal role in the organization. The same techniques used to help members cope with other challenges in schools—sharing stories, offering constructive advice, and mentoring—have been found to promote healthy, culturally competent behaviors. School personnel must view cultural competence as a constant learning process, requiring diligence, perseverance, and commitment to remain with the process.

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About the Author

Don C. Locke has been for eight years director of the Asheville Graduate Center and director of the North Carolina State University doctoral program in Adult and Community College Education at that center. Prior to that he was professor and head of the Department of Counselor Education at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. He has also been a high school counselor and social studies teacher. Don has held many major leadership positions within the American Counseling Association, including serving on the ACA Governing Council, and being chairman of the Counseling and Human Development Foundation. Most recently he has been president of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision and president of Chi Sigma Iota International. He is the author or coauthor of more than 60 publications with a current focus on multicultural issues. He can be reached at dlocke@unca.edu.